

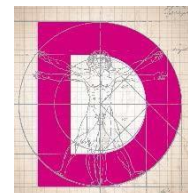
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CLEESE, John, *So, Anyway...*, New York, Crown Archetype (Random House), 2014, 392 pages.

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Former Monty Python John Cleese has just published a book of memoirs, the type of book that one can imagine would come out of Monty Python's head. John Cleese has, thus, followed the path previously started by his colleague and dearest friend Graham Chapman in *Autobiobiography of Liar*, vol. VI, which had precedents throughout the Western world: Groucho Marx, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, or Pierre Cami.

It has been a long-lasting tradition among humorists to write down their first experiences in life and what made them join the world of comedy or satire. We feel compelled to read these types of books to find out whether they had a stroke of genius or were just average persons who one day realized they were funny.

From the very beginning John Cleese starts writing about his life with his family, detailing some of the classic situations that a middle-class boy from a middle-class family in a very middle-class city could face right after the Second World War. Let's not forget that Great Britain was, and to some extent still is, a very class-aware society where very minor differences could become crucial. One such difference could be found in the way Cleese's parents came to become a couple.

The writer's father was an insurance agent, what the former Python would describe as middle-lower-middle class, while the comedian's maternal grandfather was a “respected” auctioneer, making him superior with regards to his future son in law. The technical and hilarious term Cleese uses is “lower-upper-middle-upper-middle class”, which clearly made his daughter's potential marriage to an insurance agent something unacceptable, because it was, oh horror of horrors!, morganatic.

The comedian's early childhood was void of any particularly glorious moments; he was one of many boys in the same situation attending a stereotypically British not-exactly-public school, where he acquired a taste for Latin and the sciences, thanks to his teacher, Captain Lancaster. This was a good man hiding behind his army rank, which made him a walking contradiction, for everyone thought that he was a good-natured man, yet everyone seemed to

have, if not outright fear, some great respect for him.

The thing about public schools, as it is made painfully clear by any Brit, is that they are neither public nor lower class or messy, as anyone from a different country might think. A “public school” in the British system is a private school with some self-respect and notable former alumni. Eton and Loretto are the paramount examples of what a “public school” is in Great Britain. But, then again, there are public schools suited for all pockets.

These memoirs continue into further detail about the Cambridge group of friends that later became the Monty Python, and one wonders about Oxford and Cambridge universities being so philosophically different. Oxford has given the world some of the brightest scholars of our time, like Richard Dawkins and Robin Lane Fox, while Cambridge has provided the world with some of the finest comedians: the Monty Python, Emma Thompson, David Mitchell, Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie and so on and so forth.

The book also touches some of the personal conundrums John Cleese had to face at different times in his life, like his constant moving from place to place or the difficulty he experienced assuming the truth when told that his best friend and partner in comedy (the late Graham Chapman) was gay, which led to some really funny conversations transcribed in the book.

The volume also gives us good comedy examples inserting excerpts of some of the sketches the tall Python was charged with writing, most of them co-written with Graham Chapman, Marty Feldman or the other Pythons. Here we insert one of the most brilliant ones besides the aeroplane sketch from *How to irritate people*:

A fashionable Knightsbridge restaurant. At a romantically lit table sit an upper-class pair, Simon and Fiona, deep in conversation. Simon takes Fiona's hand tenderly.

SIMON: When one's with one, darling... one feels one's... one.

FIONA: One won what?

SIMON: No. One's at one...

FIONA: Oh! At one with oneself

SIMON: No, at one with... one

Fiona smiles

FIONA: One so agrees

Simon looks deeply into Fiona's eyes

SIMON: ... One loves one, darling

FIONA: One loves one, too.

She kisses his hand

SIMMON: Where was one, darling?

FIONA: One was saying one's wife doesn't understand one...

We have to strongly recommend this book, for these moments of utter British comedic brilliance, whatever your means of its acquisition are: purchasing it, borrowing it from a library, stealing it from a library, stealing it from a bookshop, buying it from a library, stealing it from the author himself, stealing the author, borrowing the library, borrowing it from the thief, acquiring the bookshop, or purchasing the thief.